QUALITY EDUCATION INITIATIVES

Manitoba Education

1. Thirty years ago, Edmund Hilary led a team of climbers which reached the peak of Mount Everest. For generations, the ascent of Everest had been regarded as an impossible goal, and this attitude was a barrier to its accomplishment. When Hilary and his team removed the barrier, many others followed.

2. In any system, there are attitudes toward what is possible. In a system committed to excellence and equal opportunity, people set challenging goals for themselves and others and are determined and optimistic about reaching them. The desire for excellence allows us to be proud of our past achievements and at the same time drives us to higher goals. The desire for equal opportunity ensures that the benefits of our efforts will be available to everyone, without regard to their sex, racial or ethnic origin, region of residence, language or income.

3. There are many very fine educators, administrators, and trustees in Manitoba. They are dedicated, caring and effective people, committed to developing the best possible system of education for the province. These people, as Hilary and his team did for climbing, show us what can be accomplished in education. We should encourage and support the efforts of all people to make use of the best practices now available.

QUALITY IN EDUCATION

4. Quality education often means different things to different people. This is understandable, and is an enriching aspect of education in Manitoba. The debates generated by these differences help us all to clarify our goals for education and require all of us continually to examine and adjust education in the light of changing social circumstances and aspirations.

5. There is agreement that there are certain priority areas in the continuing pursuit of quality, as well as some more specific indicators of what we mean by quality. Shown in tabular form, these include, for example:

PRIORITY AREA	INDICATORS OF QUALITY
Programs	For all students, a good grounding in essential skills of literacy and numeracy, preparation for productive working lives, the development of skills for effective participation in Canadian society, an appreciation of the basic values of Canadian society, and awareness of important social and political issues
Instruction	Positive and purposeful school climates, supportive learning environments, clear goals,

	educators who use proven strategies and are able to meet changing needs, recognition of special needs and a focus on the development of thinking, personal and social abilities as well as the acquisition of knowledge
Involvement	Effective student, parental and community involvement in all aspects of the school, school programs which are responsive to community needs, and close parent and teacher, school and community relationships
Assessment	Clear plans for student and program assessment, effective and fair use of a broad range of assessment information, and fair treatment of those affected by assessment

RECENT ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND THE CONTINUING PURSUIT OF QUALITY

6. Quality in education has been an ongoing commitment of all educational organizations in the province. Because of this, Manitoba's educational system has been improving continually and is now better than ever before. Our programs are of high quality and are available to more students. Our system of financing education has been made more equitable. A support system for small schools has been introduced. New programs and curricula have been prepared, supported by a strong implementation program. Major capital expenditures have been made for the improvement of existing facilities. A policy on child abuse and guidelines for school closure have been developed.

7. These accomplishments reflect the commitment of all educational organizations in the province to quality and to certain means by which quality is to be achieved. The means by which we pursue quality reflect the following principles:

- the recognition of, and building upon, the excellence and equality that are already in the system

- the desirability of a cooperative and voluntary approach to enhancing the quality of education

- the awareness that flexibility is needed to take into account the many different educational situations that exist in the province

- the recognition of the commitment and contribution of educators,

administrators, school trustees, students, and parents alike

- the value of leadership and a system-wide climate which supports the efforts of educators, trustees, parents, and students to make schools more effective and satisfying environments for everyone in them.

These principles have been very important to the development of education in Manitoba in recent years. They should continue to guide future efforts to enhance further the quality of education in the province and they underlie the specific new quality education initiatives which follow.

NEW QUALITY EDUCATION INITIATIVES

8. The Minister of Education, The Honourable Maureen Hemphill, has invited the Manitoba Association of School Superintendents, The Manitoba Association of School Trustees and the Manitoba Teachers' Society to consider and to participate in or support a number of specifc initiatives intended to enhance further the quality of education in Manitoba. The initiatives are:

- a program to recognize and publicize especially high levels of achievement in language arts, science and mathematics, and exceptional accomplishments in parent and student involvement in education, Canadian Studies, Native education and special education

- services to support planning activities at the school level which will help educators and parents to organize themselves for improvement planning, to establish their own agendas for school improvement, and to develop strategies and schedules for the implementation of improvement plans. These services will be offered in consultation with local trustees and administrators and are designed to help schools, not to evaluate or inspect them

- support for the development of regional networks of schools to demonstrate educational practices which people in those schools have found to be highly effective and to serve as sites for the in-service education of other teachers on those practices

- a consultation process to develop guidelines that will enable us to make the best possible use of professional development resources in the province and to identify long-term priorities in the retraining of teachers

- programs for teachers in a number of areas including, for example, French Immersion, elementary science education, health education, and the education of children with multiple handicaps, as well as wrokshops to strengthen the early identification and programming skills of kindergarten and primary teachers

• regional workshops to examine the variety of student assessment techniques and procedures now used in Manitoba, to provide training in the most appropriate use of assessment information in planning programs of school improvement, and to illustrate how assessment information can be communicated effectively

• a series of invitational regional conferences to examine the meaning of quality in education and the characteristics of effective education, and to develop ways of enabling families and communities to support teaching and learning in schools, as well as ways of implementing these strategies at the school level.

9. Exceptional accomplishments at the school, division or district level will be recognized and publicized. Initially, emphasis will be placed on:

• achievement, recognizing approaches to teaching and learning which have resulted in especially high levels of achievement in language arts, science and mathematics

• parent involvement, drawing attention to activities which result in extensive and meaningful public involvement in education and which utilize effectively the many resources and supports that parents and community members can bring to public education

• student involvement, focussing on activities which result in extensive and meaningful student involvement in school governance, teaching and instruction, extra-curricular activities or service to the community

• Canadian Studies, highlighting activities and programs which reflect Canada's multicultural heritage and political traditions, which are an intergral part of a school's total curriculum, and which incorporate a variety of materials and a diversity of student learning experiences

• Native education, emphasizing activities, programs and events which reflect the infusion of Native literature, languages, cultures and histories into all aspects of teaching and the curriculum

• special education, featuring programs which have ensured that students with special needs have gained access to a full range of educational opportunities within settings that separate them as little as possible from the rest of the student body or which have prepared them effectively for further education or employment.

Accomplishments which do not fall within the above areas may also be recognized. Recognition will be made of schools, divisions, or districts, the programs or activities of which will have potential for use as models in other schools, divisions or districts in the province. All will be publicized in the general and professional media and, where appropriate, may be recognized at the annual general meetings of the Manitoba Association of School Trustees and the Manitoba Teachers' Society.

10. Manitoba Education will offer consultative support for school-based planning projects, recognizing that: the school is one of the most important units of the educational system; schools vary in their needs and in their resources for planning and implementing improvements; and School Divisions and Districts vary in their ability to support school-based improvement programs.

On request, and in consultation with Superintendents and School Boards, Manitoba Education will provide consultative support to schools and communities which engage in planning programs of educational improvement. This support is designed to be of assistance to schools and foster their development, and definitely not to evaluate or inspect them.

Through this service, it is expected that Manitoba Education can help schools and communities to, for example:

- organize themselves for improvement planning

- establish an agenda for school improvement. This might include, for example, attention to goals and priorities, concern for increased opportunities for all students, emphasis on instruction, or the promotion of student and parent involvement in instruction and educational programs

- design a suitable improvement planning process

- secure student, community and inter-agency as well as staff involvement in the planning process

- develop a strategy and a schedule for the implementation of improvement plans.

This service is intended to become an ongoing service of Manitoba Education and will be available on request to all schools in the province. Services will be provided by a team of Manitoba Education staff members skilled in school level improvement work, able to communicate effectively with many different audiences and willing to develop supportive relations with people in schools; they will also represent such diverse areas of expertise as Language Arts, Mathematics, Special Education, English as a Second Language, Native Education and educational research and measurement.

In addition, self study and resource guides to quality education and supporting professional development and reference materials will be published by Manitoba Education and distributed to all schools in the province.

11. Manitoba Education, will seek the cooperation of School Divisions and Districts, the Manitoba Teachers' Society, the Manitoba Association of School Superintendents, the Manitoba Association of School Trustees and other interested

organizations, to form regional networks of schools to demonstrate educational practices which they have found to be successful and to serve as sites for the in-service education of teachers on those practices.

Throughout the province, educators have implemented successful instructional practices and have developed the experience needed if other educators are to use them effectively. Regional networks to share information and experience with these practices will make an important contribution to the in-service education of teachers and administrators.

Initially, the networks might feature the work of schools which have implemented successfully instructional practices such as:

- cooperative learning, mastery learning and other systematic approaches to instruction including those described in Project TEACH of the Manitoba Teachers' Society
- strategies especially suited for use in multigraded classrooms
- broadly conceived approaches to parent involvement in instruction.

As sites for the in-service education of teachers, the participating schools will provide visiting teachers and administrators from throughout the region and from other parts of the province with:

- opportunities to observe and discuss these practices, their effects, and the conditions necessary for their successful implementation in schools and classrooms
- training in the use of the practices, to include the presentation of theory, demonstrations, practice in teaching, structured feedback and coaching.

The creation of the networks will help to ensure communication, collaboration, mutual support and commitment to results among the participating schools and organizations.

The networks will be directed by steering committees representative of the schools and the other participants. Because of the emphasis on the in-service education of teachers, especially close liaison will be maintained with the Manitoba Teachers' Society and division- and district-level administrators responsible for professional development.

Manitoba Education will provide:

- staff support to the networks
- financial support, publicity and coordination for the networks

- research, evaluation and reporting services.

Participating divisions, districts, schools and organizations will be asked to provide:

- modest funds to support travel costs associated with network meetings

- professional development time as needed for the successful accomplishment of network purposes and occasional release time for persons with special responsibilities

- demonstrations and in-service education to visiting teachers and administrators.

12. There are several matters related to the inservice education of teachers which are important and which will require the cooperative attention of Manitoba Education, MASS, MAST and the MTS. Enumerated briefly, and not in order of priority, these include:

- levels and sources of funding for in-service education

- the characteristics of effective and satisfying in-service education and how these might become regular features of in-service education practices in Manitoba

- equity in access to in-service education opportunities

- the training of in-service education leaders

- leadership, responsibilities and control in in-service education

- time for in-service education

- the administration, delivery and scheduling of in-service education

- the creation of province-wide, district- and school-level climates which support in-service education.

The most appropriate mechanism for addressing these matters is an interorganizational committee on in-service education. The committee will include two representatives from Manitoba Education and two persons nominated by each of MASS, MAST, and the MTS. The terms of reference for the Committee would be to:

- review existing in-service education practices in Manitoba

- study problems, issues and opportunities in inservice education

- consider and make recommendations about ways in which to make the best

possible use of existing in-service education resources in the province

- identify areas in which innovation in in-service education is needed and to recommend ways in which needed innovation might be encouraged and supported

- develop guidelines to improve in-service education practices at all levels and make recommendations for their use throughout the system

- recommend ongoing mechanisms for the coordination of in-service education in the province.

Where appropriate, recommendations would be made both to the Minister of Education and to participating organizations.

13. A number of piorities in the retraining of teachers have been identified, for example: additional bursaries for teachers enrolled in French language immersion programs during the summer, a French immersion program for teachers during the school year, non-credit courses for French immerion teachers in science, art and computer science, regional courses for K-9 teachers in Health education, upgrading middle years teachers with limited background in science education, special "internships" for newly asssigned occupational entrance teachers, regional summer courses for teachers of early childhood education, intensive workshops for teachers of multi-handicapped students, and workshops to strengthen the early identification and programming skills of kindergarten and primary teachers.

14. Everyone agrees that effective educational practice requires the continuous appraisal of student progress in all areas of development. Yet the matter of student assessment is very controversial at all levels of public education, from the school to the province.

The list of issues in student assessment is familiar to both educators and the general public and includes, for example:

- the identification of criteria for student assessment, the development of tests and of procedures for test administration, analysis and interpretation

- the relationships between what is tested and what is taught

- the possibility of distorting education because of a narrow emphasis on academic achievement and "teaching to the test"

- accountability and standards

- costs in money and instructional time.

At the same time, student assessment practices in Manitoba vary widely. A variety

of different tests are used. Several divisions have ceased using standardized achievement tests altogether; others administer them twice a year. Some divisions and districts require all of their students to take the Manitoba Provincial Assessment Program tests; others restrict their participation to a sample of students. This variability can be traced to local opinion and policy about student testing programs.

Because of these issues and the variability of assessment practices in Manitoba, there are no simple solutions to problems in the assessment of student achievement at the district, division or provincial levels. Manitoba Education will undertake the preparation of workshops and training programs for teachers, administrators and trustees on the assessment of student achievement. These will review the variety of assessment tests and procedures available, examine potential problems in their use, and provide training in the best possible use and communication of assessment test information.

15. From personal and professional experience, and through educational research, we know that education is a family and a community, as well as a professional, enterprise: schools which are most effective are able to establish open and mutually supportive relationships between communities and schools, families and teachers. We also know that communities and families seek opportunities for constructive, meaningful involvement in public education.

Manitoba Education will invite the Manitoba Association of School Superintendents, the Manitoba Association of School Trustees and the Manitoba Teachers' Society to co-sponsor a series of invitational regional workshops on quality education to:

- examine the meaning of quality in education and the characteristics of effective education

- focus attention on how communities and schools, families and teachers, can work together to shape student achievement and development

- continue the process of public involvement in education

- develop appropriate strategies enabling communities and families to support teaching and learning in schools, as well as ways of implementing these strategies at the school level.

These regional workshops would be invitational and designed to represent students, parents, and members of the community at large as well as teachers, administrators and trustees. They could be held in five centers--for example, Winnipeg, Brandon, Swan River, Thompson and Norway House.